

The Honorable Judge Ronnie Abrams
United States District Court
Thurgood Marshall United States Courthouse
40 Foley Square
New York, NY 10007

June 1, 2023

Your Honor:

I write to you regarding the sentencing of Carlos Macci, who has entered a plea of guilty to narcotics offenses in conjunction with the overdose death of Michael K. Williams. And as a close friend and professional colleague of Mr. Williams, I urge you to consider leniency.

Specifically, I met Michael in 2002 when, as a writer and producer, I first cast him in a role in an HBO production that broadcast for five seasons and chronicled the tragic American diaspora that is the drug war. From that moment, I came to know and love Michael, not only for his great talent but for his charm, honesty, integrity, and commitment to social justice.

The production in which he had been cast, "The Wire," was not purposed as entertainment but rather as a careful critique of our drug prohibition and the human cost underlying those policies. Similarly, those who created that drama were not products of the television industry or trained as filmmakers and dramatists.

I was a police reporter at the Baltimore Sun from 1983 until 1995, covering the drug war in Baltimore extensively. I wrote two books of narrative nonfiction on the subject, one which resulted from my being embedded in the Baltimore Police Department's Homicide Unit for an entire year, and the second one, "The Corner," chronicled a year in the life of a drug-saturated West Baltimore neighborhood in from the point of view of those being policed.

My co-author of "The Corner" and my co-creator in the development of "The Wire" was a 20-year veteran of the Baltimore department who had served as both a homicide detective and a narcotics investigator, detailed to series of prolonged Title III drug probes with both the FBI and DEA in Baltimore. Ed Burns retired from law enforcement in 1990, then taught public school in Baltimore before journeying with me to Monroe and Fayette Streets in West Baltimore to chronicle the drug war at ground zero. Too many people we met that year are no longer with us; addiction devoured so many in the neighborhood. But of course, all of that happened despite my city's aggressive prosecution of the drug war in all respects.

Ed and I have profound respect for law enforcement, the ethos that underlies good police work, and the need for a systemic response to crimes against property and people. Nor are we dismissive of the destructive effect and human cost of the drug trade itself. But our journalism and then, our

transformation of that journalism into television drama, makes the argument that the drug prohibition and the mass incarceration and police militarization that has resulted from that policy ill-serves our nation, our city, and especially, the most vulnerable neighborhoods in that city. What we learned in Baltimore convinced us that the medicalization and rationalization of drug addiction, as well as a less draconian and more restorative means of addressing street-level drug trafficking, would, at the least, not compound the destructive effects of the drugs themselves. We have spent the last three decades making that argument in various forums.

Which brought Ed and myself to know and love Michael.

He was one of the finest actors with whom I have had the honor to collaborate and one of the most thoughtful, gracious and charitable souls I could ever call a friend. Beyond even "The Wire" and its arguments, Michael's commitment to challenging our nation's rates of incarceration and our reliance on drug prohibition continued with his documentary work and with his engagement with ex-felons and restorative justice groups. Singularly among the actors we worked with on our drama, Michael took to heart themes and messages in our narrative, and for years after our production concluded, he continued to deliver that message in word and deed. I admired him and maintained our friendship long past the years of our professional collaboration. I loved the man, honestly.

He had demons, yes. But Michael's struggles were never made manifest by any outward affront to others; instead, as we filmed in Baltimore, we became aware of a deep and abiding loneliness that had long accompanied Mike on his journey. In the third season of our drama, he came to our line producer and quietly acknowledged his struggles with addiction. Then, to stay at work – which was, in fact, a stabilizing influence in his life – he readily agreed to let us help him address his drug use, going so far as to seek the constant companionship of a crew member whose job was to assure some distance between Mike and temptation. We watched, relieved and delighted, as Michael Williams restored himself.

That said, Mike was always aware that addiction and the impulse toward addiction would remain a constant in his life. He spoke of it to me bluntly at points, and he never discounted the threat. At the same time, in all of his address of these struggles, Michael always declared that he was responsible for himself, that the decision whether to use or to cease using would always be his own. When one of his previous sources of supply – not a dealer, but a co-user – was discovered to have some proximity to our film sets, Michael insisted that the matter was to be addressed by changes in his own behavior rather than anything punitive to anyone else. I never failed to see him take responsibility for himself and his decisions.

It is this attitude – coupled with Michael's publicly stated opposition to mass incarceration and the drug war, which he detailed in many film projects and personal commitments – that convinces me that he would want me to write this letter.

What happened to Mike is a grievous tragedy and a grievous abbreviation of human potential. I feel the loss all the time, certainly whenever I have cause to think about Michael Williams in any respect. I miss my friend.

But I know that Michael would look upon the undone and desolate life of Mr. Macci and know two things with certainty: First, that it was Michael who bears the fuller responsibility for what happened. And second, no possible good can come from incarcerating a 71-year-old soul, largely illiterate, who has himself struggled with a lifetime of addiction and who has not engaged in street-level sales of narcotics with ambitions of success and profit but rather as someone caught up in the diaspora of addiction himself, living one day to the next and heedless of the damage done not only to others but to himself. Michael would look at Mr. Macci and hope against hope that this moment in which he finds himself might prove redemptive, that his remaining years might amount to something more, and that by the grace of love and leniency, something humane and worthy might be rescued from this tragedy.

Honestly, that is who my friend was and what he believed. And I am proud to write to you now and honor the work that we did together and the further work that Michael did on his own. He believed in redemption. He fought hard for his own and for everyone in Baltimore, Brooklyn, and everywhere else he encountered. He would fight for Mr. Macci.

Your honor, thank you for your patience and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Simon', with a stylized, flowing script.

David Simon
Blown Deadline Productions
1414 William Street
Baltimore, MD 21230